

Ethnic Origins of Early Kentucky Land Grantees

by John B. Sanderlin

There have been a number of studies of the ethnic origins of Kentucky's early population. In 1931, Howard F. Barker and Marcus L. Hansen published a study of the American population's European ancestry in 1790. Their work was based on taking distinctive surnames that represent a certain percentage of an ethnic population and developing a mathematical coefficient for that name. These coefficients would then be used to estimate the ethnic element in the population under review. In 1982, Thomas L. Purvis¹ recalculated the distribution of the white population of Kentucky in 1790 using the Barker-Hansen² technique as refined by Forrest and Helen Shapiro McDonald.³ But are there more accurate methods of calculating the ethnic origins of Kentucky's early settlers?

Several years ago Neal O. Hammon suggested that a fruitful approach to the problem might be found in an analysis of the specific grantee names, as contained in the original land grants. Such a study could well prove more accurate than the statistical approaches previously used. Hammon's computerized listing of these grants contained the grantees in alphabetical order. The list included the names of all 1,327 individuals who had settled or preempted Kentucky land from 1773 to 1779 and excluded only the names of those who applied and were rejected.⁴

The author holds a master's degree in business administration from Harvard University. Retired from his position as vice-president of international relations for Anaconda Aluminum Company, he resides on a farm in Shelby County.

¹Thomas L. Purvis, "The Ethnic Descent of Kentucky's Early Population: A Statistical Investigation of European and American Sources of Emigration, 1790-1820," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 80 (1982): 153-66 (hereafter *Register*).

²American Council of Learned Societies, "Report of the Committee on Linguistic and National Stocks in the Population of the United States," in American Historical Association, *Annual Report for the Year 1931*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1932), 1:124.

³Forrest McDonald and Helen Shapiro McDonald, "The Ethnic Origins of the American People, 1790," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1980): 179-87.

⁴"Certificate Book of the Virginia Land Commission of 1779-80," *Register* 21 (1923): 3-291; Neal O. Hammon, "Settlers, Land Jobbers, and Outlyers: A Quantitative Analysis

The first step in the study was to prepare a preliminary classification of these names, the results of which are shown in Table I. If a name fell into more than one category, it appears

TABLE I
Classification of 1,327 Surnames of Kentucky
Settlers and Preemptors, 1773-1779

E	779	E-Cs	14	F	12
E/W	39	E-Ci	18	Gm	30
E/S	70	E-Cs,Ci	36	Du	7
E/I	3	Cs	77	Gm-Du	4
W	28	Ci	36	E-Gm	8
S	9	Cs-Ci	87	Slav	4
I	1	E-F	3	U	61
S/I	1				

E Surnames of Old English and Scandinavian form, Norman and other "Conquest" names, and Flemish names domiciled in England prior to A.D. 1400. Early Anglicizations of Biblical, Greek, and Latin names are also included here.

W Welsh Celtic names and English names of Welsh form or spelling such as "Pritchard."

S English names of Scotch form or spelling such as "Diuguid."

I English names of Irish form or spelling.

Cs,Ci Surnames of Celtic origin, locally identified where possible.

E/W,S,I English names commonly found in Wales, Scotland, or Ireland as well as in England. The classification is uncertain.

E/C English names that frequently represent Anglicizations of Celtic names further identified as E/Cs, E/Ci.

F French names. Where the same form of a name is found both in England and France at this period, the name will generally be treated as English.

Du,Gm Dutch and German.

Slav Slavic names.

U Unidentified names.

in a combined category. For example, thirty-nine names are classified as "E/W". This designation means these surnames are either English surnames or English surnames commonly found in Wales, such as James or Edwards. In like manner, thirty-six names are classified as "E-Cs, Ci", which indicates that the name could be either English or Celtic and that the Celtic element could not be further classified as Irish or Scottish. Welsh Celtic names were not separately classified as such; coming from the Brythonic form of Celtic, they are not readily confused with Irish or Scottish Celtic names which come from the Goidelic. No separate classification of "Scotch-Irish" names was made for reasons that will be discussed later.

Table I shows the British element as at least 90 percent and the English portion of that as at least 60 percent of the total. Since a breakdown of the combined categories would be desirable, several further steps were taken. First, the English names of Scottish families or septs associated with a specific clan were transferred from the English category to the English/Scotch one.⁵ Some eighty-eight of the names in the study were involved. In 1966, C. M. Matthews estimated the percentage of Welsh ancestry of the most popular Welsh surnames in London.⁶ These percentages were used to separate the names classified as English/Welsh in Table I. The Celtic names which could not be otherwise separated into Scotch or Irish elements were arbitrarily separated by the ratio of Scotch to Irish names (both Celtic and non-Celtic) in the study. The four German/Dutch names were reclassified as three German and one Dutch name in like manner based on the ratio of German to Dutch names. The very few English/French and the English/German names were treated as French and German respectively for simplicity's sake. Finally, the combined English/Scotch and English/Irish categories were separated by the proportion of total English to Scotch and English to Irish names. The revised tabulation of the 1,327 names appears as follows:

⁵Robert Bain, *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland* (London and Glasgow, 1948), especially 9-27.

⁶C. M. Matthews, *English Surnames* (New York, 1966), 74-78.

TABLE II
Revised Calculation of Settlers and Preemptors

English	896
Welsh	54
Scotch	182
Irish	66
French	15
German	41
Dutch	8
Slavic	4
Unknown	61

Before discussing these results further, it might be well to discuss the origin of the "Scotch-Irish." Although Ireland had been conquered in the name of the English Crown in the thirteenth century, it had largely escaped subjection until the conquest and plantations of the Tudor period. Ulster, however, remained a challenge.⁷ In order to quell rebellions at the beginning of the seventeenth century, about the same time as the founding of the American colonies, the native Irish landlords were driven out of Ulster and the best lands were granted to English landlords. Protestant English and Lowland Scots were brought over and settled on the land.⁸ The Scots remained Presbyterian and did not mix in any way with the Catholic Irish.⁹ In the first half of the eighteenth century, it was said, the population of Ireland "was sharply divided into three sections having little in common: native Irish, Ulster Presbyterians, and the Anglo-Irish ruling caste."¹⁰ During the eighteenth century, emigration from Ireland to America was "almost entirely" by the Ulster Scottish Presbyterians with "very few" Anglicans or Catholics.¹¹ A significant reason was their persecution as dissenters from the established church. However, they were the only dissenters so perse-

⁷Margaret MacCurtain, *Tudor and Stuart Ireland* (Dublin, 1972), 106.

⁸*Ibid.*, 107, 115.

⁹*Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁰Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy, 1714-60* (Oxford, 1962), 288.

¹¹Edith Mary Johnston, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1974), 31. Direct quotation of "almost entirely" and "very few" makes a stronger case than would be found in a standard American history.

cuted. They were feared for their numbers and organization and the political implications of their beliefs.¹² Thus, it may be concluded that there is no reason to try to segregate the Scotch-Irish from the Scotch for they are of essentially the same stock, and that almost all of the emigration from Ireland was by the Ulster Scotch during this period.

This emigration pattern was somewhat confirmed by reviewing the "Mac" and "O" names of the Virginia immigrants from 1623 through 1732 as shown by the following table:¹³

TABLE III
Totals of "Mac" and "O" Surnames
in Virginia Immigrants, 1623-1732

	MAC	O'
1623-1666	92	48
1666-1695	116	21
1695-1732	216	20

Overall, there are twenty thousand names in the first period and approximately the same number in each of the other two periods, indicating a relatively small proportion of Celtic names, even if the "Mac" and "O" names are only part of the Celtic total. Moreover, the "Mac" names are increasingly more numerous than the "O" names, ranging from twice as many in the first period to ten times as many in the third period. One would expect more "O" names than "Mac" names in an Irish community. For example, Matthews lists five "O" names among the twenty-one common names in Dublin in 1960-65 and only one "Mac" name.¹⁴ Of the other names, more of them originally had an "O" than a "Mac."

In our particular study of Kentucky, there are one "O" name and eighty-seven "Mac" names. Of course, one should remember the tendency to Anglicize Celtic names, which was perhaps considerably stronger in Ireland than in Scotland. Even so, the results

¹²Williams, *The Whig Supremacy*, 271-306, passim.

¹³Figures in the table were derived from a page-by-page compilation of the names appearing in Nell Marion Nugent's three-volume *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623-1732* (Baltimore and Richmond, 1979).

¹⁴Matthews, *English Surnames*, 336.

are striking.

By 1760, the population of the American colonies had reached two and one-half million. The population of Great Britain totaled more than ten million, broken down as follows:¹⁵

TABLE IV
British Population, 1760

England and Wales	6,625,000
Scotland	1,250,000
Ulster Protestants	450,000
Rest of Ireland	2,000,000

If we exclude all of Ireland except the Ulster Protestants from the total, it is reduced to some 8.3 million. Although not at all indicative of the actual source of British emigration, it is interesting to note that the Scotch element including Ulster represents about 20 percent of this total of 8.3 million. This compares with about 16 percent in our study.

How do our data compare with previous studies? Table V compares the recently developed data with that of Purvis and Barker-Hansen. The recent data, it should be noted, cover a population in the period 1773-79, while the other two studies cover a different population in 1790.

The most striking difference is that the present study shows a considerably larger English element than either of the previous studies, a smaller German element than Barker-Hansen, and a smaller Scotch element than Purvis. The difference in the German element could result from differences in populations studied. Still it is rather large, suggesting that perhaps the German element in Kentucky's early population may have been overplayed.

The different proportion of Scotch ethnic descent in the present study as compared with that of Purvis is more difficult to resolve because of the substantial English ethnic element¹⁶ in Scotland. Hence, a large number of English names occur in

¹⁵J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III* (Oxford, 1976), 10, 178. The Ulster Protestants are not separated. The calculations are my own, based on there being one-sixth non-Catholics. Williams, *The Whig Supremacy*, 288.

¹⁶Defined in Table I. A large part of the ancient English kingdom of Northumbria was incorporated into the Kingdom of Scotland, thus Anglicizing the Lowlands.

Scotland as well as an English ethnic population. Perhaps if the Scotch proportion has been understated, it is by this new group which is ethnically English, tending to make the results realistic in terms of ethnic origin.

TABLE V
Comparison of Percentages
of Ethnic Elements in Kentucky Population

	Barker-Hansen Estimate (1931)	Purvis Estimate (1982)	Present Study (1987)
English	57.9	51.6	70.8
Scotch-Irish and Scots	17.0	24.8	14.4
Irish	5.2	9.0	5.2
Welsh	with English	6.7	4.3
German	14.0	4.9	3.2
French	2.2	1.6	1.2
Dutch	1.3	1.2	0.6
Swedish	0.5	0.2	—
Slavic	—	—	0.3

Note to Table V. The percentages shown above exclude the sixty-one unidentified names. These unidentified names were classified "by appearance" to see what impact they might have had on the study. The only significant effect would be to increase the German names by about one percentage point and the Scotch and French names by half a point each. The English names would be correspondingly reduced by about one percentage point.

In summary, the present study contradicts a number of opinions. Many writers tend to discuss the ethnic background of Kentucky, and the South in general, on essentially a non-English basis. A good example of this is a statement by William E. Schmidt, writing for the New York *Times* News Service: "The South never received the waves of Continental Europeans that swept the more industrial North, which means that the essential speech patterns drawn from the region's original Scotch and Irish ancestry have been less diluted."¹⁷ Other writers describe the Scotch and Irish

¹⁷Louisville *Courier-Journal*, December 7, 1985.

input as a totally Celtic one, ignoring the large English element in Scotland and the lesser one in Ireland. A typical instance is the McWhiney-McDonald thesis that the antebellum southerners were primarily of Celtic origin and that this distinctiveness (as opposed to the English influence found in the North) led to civil war.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Professor Rowland Berthoff of Washington University has challenged McWhiney's and McDonald's basic assumptions for identifying surnames as a "wildly inaccurate" interpretation of Celtic predominance in Scotland, Northern England, and Ulster.¹⁹ Finally, there is the question of the Scotch-Irish, whom some have called neither Scotch nor Irish (since most of them came from the Scottish Lowlands).²⁰ It is doubtful that any of them spoke Gaelic (or Irish, as it was frequently called) even in Scotland, as some writers have claimed,²¹ for the Gaelic influence was one of the things the government was trying to eliminate by the plantations of Ireland. Even so, some writers treat them as a fierce mixture of Celtic Scotch and Irish that essentially populated the South. Names like Jackson are often referred to as being uniformly Scotch-Irish, a view which completely ignores the English background and frequency of the name.

In this study, quite the opposite of a largely Celtic origin is found. In Kentucky, during the early period of settlement, the population was by far of predominantly English stock.

¹⁸Grady McWhiney and Forrest McDonald, "The Celtic Influence in Southern History," *Journal of Southern History* 46 (1980): 80.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Margaret McCurtain, in her *Tudor and Stuart Ireland*, refers to them specifically as Lowland Scotch.

²¹George Norman Clark, *The Later Stuarts, 1660-1714* (Oxford, 1956), 410.